Hoover Floated Hoax Story on King

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By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

The FBI vendetta against Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. didn't end with his murder. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who had tried to blacken King's name while he was alive, also tried to tarnish it after his death.

Not long after King was gunned down on the balcony of his Memphis motel on April 4, 1968, Hoover sent word to me that the motive behind the murder was cuckoldry, that the assassin apparently had been hired by a jealous husband.

I have held back this story for more than seven years because of my rule against revealing sources. But Hoover is now fading from the contemporary scene into history. His incredible attempt to panic King into committing suicide, it seems to me, also abrogates any right he may have had to confidentiality. Therefore, I have decided it is in the public interest to tell the story.

Back in 1968, I was on good terms with the old FBI curmudgeon. He sent word through an intermediary that King's killer, James Earl Ray, had been in Los Angeles shortly before he returned east to stalk the civil rights leader.

Hoover's messenger suggested that Ray had been hired by a jealous husband, who had become enraged by the discovery that his wife had borne King's child. The intermediary identified the Los Angeles couple and showed me supporting data, including an FBI report describing a passionate interlude between the wife and Dr. King in a New York City hotel.

I was eager, of course, to find out who was behind the assassination. So I flew to Los Angeles and did my dainnedest to confirm the FBI leads. I waylaid the wife and husband separately for confrontational interviews, and questioned others who might have known of the alleged love affair, the paternity of the child or the attitude of the husband toward King.

I could find absolutely no evidence that contradicted the couple's own explanation that Dr. King was an honored friend of the family, a frequent guest in their home and nothing more.

I also discovered with deepening apprehension that there were no FBI agents on this trail that was supposed to be so hot. I returned to Washington satisfied that the FBI story was erroneous and half convinced that it was a deliberate hoax.

Yet I was reluctant to believe ill of Hoover. Like so many others, I wanted to believe there was at least one rock of integrity in Washington. He had, after all, created a miracle — an honest and efficient police force out of what had been in 1924 a corrupt menagerie of drunks, hacks, misfits and courthouse hangers on. So I kept the jury out on Hoover.

In late 1970 the jury came in, for me. I happened to be on an airplane with the late Rep. Hale Boggs (D-La.), then the House majority leader. He told me how members of Congress were being intimidated, if not blackmailed, by Hoover.

He said that the FBI would come upon a skeleton in a member's closet — a woman, a vice, a shady business associate — and then get word to him that an accusation against him had reached the FBI and they wanted to alert him so he could be on his guard. From then on the member was likely to be a captive of Hoover.

For the next few days, I circulated among officials and reporters who were likely to know something about the dark side of Hoover. I discovered that every last one of them was afraid of Hoover. A check of the newspaper morgues in late 1970 demonstrated the result of Hoover's carrot-and-stick mastery of public relations: decades of laudatory, often

The Washington Post C18
Washington Star-News ___
Daily News (New York) ___
The New York Times ___
The Wall Street Journal ___
The National Observer ___
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:dolizing coverage; but no sustained, brass-knuckled, mass circulation attack and few criticisms of any kind.

Because we believed no police official should ever become this powerful in America, we began an investigation of the FBI chief. In a series of columns that ran sporadically from December, 1970, through the fall of 1971, we revealed among other things:

That Hoover had received $50,000 for books written in his name by FBI personnel on government time; that he had accepted annual free vacations at the Hotel Del Charro near the Del Mar, Calif., race track from oil millionaire Clint Murchison Jr.; that Hoover used the FBI to dig up and ciculate dirt about the private lives of prominent Americans who had committed no crimes; that he had kept members of Congress under surveillance then lied about it.

We also discovered that the man of steel, the deity who kept a life-sized bronze bust of himself in the foyer of his home, was in reality, even as you and I, a fatty with a sweet tooth and a stomach full of gas pains; a dweller in a burglary-ridden neighborhood whose own Christmas lights had been vandalized; a fearful old man who crouched in one corner of his bulletproof limousine and propped up his hat in another corner.

As the months of 1971 passed, and it was seen that we had not been struck down by lightning, critical scrutiny began throughout the national media — Life, Time, Newsweek, the daily press, nightly television.

The result was instructive. Hoover suddenly pulled in his horns.

White House aides complained that Hoover had grown soft. But Hoover had rediscovered the restraints of the American system — too late for his reputation but not too late for the country.

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